

Remarks of Sen. Lamar Alexander on Senator Kennedy's 15,000th vote

I would not want all the accolades to come from that side of the aisle. Forty years ago I came to this body as a very young legislative aide to the United States Senator Howard Baker. Ted Kennedy was a very young United States Senator but already in his second term. All the talk for the first few months, and I imagine Senator Byrd can remember this, was about how long would it take for Senator Baker, a new republican Senator, to break on some important issue with his father-in-law, the republican leader, Senator Everett Dirksen. After a few months, we knew, because Senator Baker walked across the aisle and joined with Senator Ted Kennedy and they fought against Senator Dirksen, Baker's father-in-law, and Sam Irvin, the most respected constitutional law on the issue of one man, one vote.

I remember working with Senator Kennedy's friend, Jim Fluge, who came back to work in the senate three or four years ago. The upstarts won. Baker and Kennedy beat Dirksen and Irvin on the one man-one vote issue. That was my first exposure to working with Senator Kennedy.

Several years passed and President Bush, one, asked me to be the education secretary. I come to Washington and what do I discover? I have to be confirmed by committee, chaired by Senator Ted Kennedy. Mr. President, that was 1991, 16 years ago. I was eventually confirmed and we worked together for nearly two years on education issues. Then, four years ago I come back and I'm in the United States Senate. Today I'm serving on the committee that once confirmed me. Who is the chairman 40 years later? Senator Ted Kennedy.

So, I've had a very special privilege of working with Senator Kennedy and admiring him both as a legislative aide and as a cabinet member and now as a colleague in the senate. I can say as a practicing republican what every senator in this body already knows. Nothing will bring a republican audience to its feet faster than a speech against high taxes, against federal control, and against Ted Kennedy. But those outside the senate might wonder, then, how could the republican leader and others of us here hold him in such affection?

I can give you one example: we have a tradition in the senate still called the maiden speech. We think about what we might say when we first come here and make it a special occasion. My first speech was about what it means to be an American. How can we put the teaching of American history and civics back in its rightful place in our classroom so our children can grow up learning what it means to be an American. This is the subject the senator from West Virginia has worked on, spoken about and legislated on many times.

After I made that remark and I introduced a piece of legislation, who was the first senator to come over and volunteer to go around among his democratic colleagues and round up enough cosponsors so the legislation could pass and be eventually appropriated. It was Senator Kennedy. I think it's -- who is the senator who at least once a year takes his entire family to some part of American history and helps

them all understand that? I remember his coming back and telling me how excited here was when the family went to Richmond and were in the church, I believe, where Patrick Henry was down on his knees and gave his speech about American liberty. So that is a part of Ted Kennedy that those in the senate on both sides of the aisle know. It is a part we respect. And it is a part we appreciate. He cares about what it means to be an American because here and his family are such an important part of American history. It is a great privilege, Mr. President, to serve in this body with Senator Kennedy.